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## **Minutes:**

# **First Meeting of the Men's Health Week 2015 Planning Group**

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**Date:** Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014  
**Time:** 11.00am - 1.45pm (including lunch)  
**Venue:** Armagh Diocesan Pastoral Centre, Dundalk, Co. Louth

### **Present:**

Eva Beirne - Irish Men's Sheds Association - Co. Louth  
Ken Brady - MALES Ireland  
Lorcan Brennan - Men's Development Network (MDN)  
John Cantwell - Fír Le Cheile (Men Together)  
Helen Forristal - Marie Keating Foundation  
Colin Fowler - Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI)  
Frances Haughey - Closing the Gap Project: Health Inequalities  
Michael Lynch - Men's Action Network (MAN)  
Peter Mulhall - The ManKind Project  
Darach Murphy - Men Alone in No-mans-land (MAIN)  
Finian Murray - Health Service Executive Dublin / North East  
Paul O'Kane - Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT)  
David Walsh - Irish Men's Sheds Association

### **Apologies:**

Scott Ahearn - See Change  
Derek Chambers - Inspire Ireland Foundation  
James Copeland - The Rainbow Project  
Paula Devine - ARK  
Alison Doake - South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust (SEHSCT)  
Sandra Gordon - Man Alive, Cancer Focus NI  
Marita Hennessy - Waterford Institute of Technology  
Jill Martin - Lewis Fertility  
Sara McCracken - British Medical Association  
Michael McKenna - YouthAction NI Working with Young Men Team  
Greg O'Donoghue - Union of Students in Ireland  
Aileen O'Reilly - Headstrong  
Umberto [Scap] Scappaticci - Colin Men's Group  
Rosemary Scott - Irish Cancer Society  
Sandra Semple - Western Health and Social Care Trust (WHSCT)  
Gary Smyth - ex-Man Matters  
Peter Topping - Relate NI  
Joanne Vance - Irish Cancer Society  
Rachel Wright - Samaritans Ireland

**Minute Taker:** Colin Fowler

# AGENDA ITEMS ...

## 1. Welcome

Colin welcomed everyone to the meeting (especially those people who had to make a considerable journey to be here) and gave an overview of the agenda and 'housekeeping' arrangements.

Colin explained that apologies were tendered from a broad range of organisations. This was due to the date not suiting everyone and, particularly, to restrictions upon their freedom to travel outside of their work catchment area / limits placed upon travel costs. These people do, however, still wish to be involved in the process of looking at what can be done to mark and celebrate Men's Health Week (MHW) this year. *[Following the Planning Meeting, a range of additional organisations also tendered their apologies, while a few organisations still have to reply to confirm their participation].*

In the early years of holding all-island meetings of the Men's Health Week (MHW) Planning Group, the gatherings were alternated between Dublin and Belfast venues. This helped the members to build relationships - as they met in person - but meant that they had to commit a lot of time to travelling to meetings. In later years, business was conducted almost exclusively via video-link between Dublin and Belfast. However, while this cut down on the amount of travel time, many members expressed a feeling that it had become quite impersonal, and it was hard to engage with others in the room as well as the people on the TV screen. As a compromise, recent Planning Groups held their first meeting at a mid-way (and fairly inconvenient to all) point between Belfast and Dublin. The participants felt that this gave them a chance (at least for their first meeting) to talk to each other face-to-face. Based upon the positive feedback, this model was adopted again today.

The partnership approach adopted in the past few years has proved to be very beneficial to MHW, and it is hoped that each participant's own area of work will also benefit from the contacts established in this and future meetings. Colin reminded everyone that this is an open forum which welcomes the input of anyone who is willing to participate. It was also acknowledged that there will, inevitably, be times when it is impossible for group members to attend meetings or contribute to the ongoing e-discussions. As in previous years, a pragmatic approach will be adopted.

Colin highlighted that the main purpose of today's meeting was to discuss options for possible themes for MHW 2015 and, if possible, to reach agreement on one. The MHW 2014 Planning Group had recommended that it would be useful to agree the theme for 2015 before the year began - as this would give everyone more time to plan their celebrations. It was also felt that it would be useful to have as many people as possible involved in this process.

## 2. Introductions

Michael invited everyone to introduce themselves - by way of helping to get to know each other and to understand the work that each person is involved in. Individuals were asked to: give their name; say which organisation they represent and what it does; briefly outline any experience / knowledge of men's work that they already have (but not their plans for Men's Health Week this year).

### 3. Overview of MHFI and MHW

Finian gave a short PowerPoint presentation on what the Men's Health Forum in Ireland (MHFI) is / does, the aims of International Men's Health Week (MHW) each year, and the previous themes that have been adopted.

The core aims of MHW each year are to ...

- Heighten awareness of preventable health problems for males.
- Support men and boys to engage in healthier lifestyle choices and activities.
- Encourage the early detection and treatment of health difficulties in males.

The themes in previous years were ...

- 2005 - Obesity
- 2006 - Mental Wellbeing
- 2007 - Long-term Conditions
- 2008 - Workplace Health
- 2009 - Access to Services
- 2010 - Physical Activity
- 2011 - These are Challenging Times. It's No Joke. Let's Talk.
- 2012 - What's Your First Instinct ... Fight? Flight? Find Out?
- 2013 - Action Men: Turning Words into Actions
- 2014 - Challenges, Choices and Celebrations: What's Your Aim?

### 4. Theme for MHW 2015

In the early years, the MHW theme in Ireland mirrored the theme in other countries. However, from 2011 onwards, there has been a tendency for each country to choose a theme which is most relevant to its own circumstances and needs. In Ireland, these themes have tended to move towards being broad and generic - to allow maximum 'buy-in' and participation from the widest range of organisations and individuals.

In advance of today's meeting, Colin issued a public request (via the 'E-Male Matters' newsletter, MHFI website, MHFI social media, and the MHW Facebook page) for individuals and organisations to submit suggestions for possible themes for MHW 2015. The deadline for submission was Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2014. By this date, 20 ideas had been submitted. These were:

- Places and Spaces for Men
- The Five Ways to Wellbeing (give / be active / connect / keep learning / take notice)
- Mental Fitness
- Smoking (and its relationship to impotence / back pain / reduced physical endurance / being a dad or partner / young men / cancer ...)
- Positive Mental Health
- Suicide Prevention
- Get Personal - talk about the things that really matter (e.g. health, money, family, friends, education etc.)
- Men as Minders (and help givers)
- Do it Together
- Make Your Voice Heard
- Men's Voices

- Make a Move - Make a Difference
- Men Matter / Man Matters
- Domestic Violence (and how it affects men)
- Need for a National Men's Council
- Accessing Services - getting what you need (help-seeking)
- Prevention is Better than Cure (could look at physical activity, alcohol, smoking, healthy eating etc.)
- Men's Health Toolbox (or Toolkit or Toolbelt)
- The Flatpack Guide to Men's Health
- 7 Questions Worth Reflecting on for a Better Life

John Cantwell submitted a further list of suggestions after this date, and these were also considered by those present at today's meeting:

- Getting Real - our health is real, let's get real about it.
- Courage to Care - Our Health. It's Always Worth It.
- A New Resilience - superior strength and wisdom for health and wellbeing.
- Fearless Men - turning up and getting down to it, our health matters.
- Brotherhood of Health - letting our health bring us together.
- Break on Through - no more neglect, time to advance.
- Men Breaking Through - new ways for our health.
- Take the Chance - seize your days of health.
- Shoulder to Shoulder - winning our health together.
- Hear the Call - new days and new ways for our health.
- Not Easy, But Worth It - men making the effort.
- What Are You Looking At? - let it be your health, brother.
- Challenge the Myths – a focus on challenging the various myths around men's health.
- Men Can Care or Real Men Can Eat Quiche - similar to above concept.
- Man Alive - a focus on the benefits of improving one's health.

The key issues raised in the discussion about possible themes for 2015 included:

- While it is true that men can - to a degree - influence some aspects of their health, their health and wellbeing is not only about what they do or how they act as individuals. It is also often affected by the environment in which they live, the jobs that they carry out, the pressures that they face in a world which emphasises gendered roles, how they are treated before the law, the way that services engage with them ... These social determinants are very powerful influencers of men's health and wellbeing.
- Darach pointed out that men's health is, in essence, 'biopsychosocial' i.e. the body, the mind and the social world are inextricably linked, and each can cause health problems. This model is not a hierarchical one that privileges one element (such as the body), but acts in complex and dynamic ways. We need to move beyond the common focus on biological causes and biological solutions which only target the individual.
- In deciding a theme for MHW 2015, we need to be careful not to blame men for their own poor health or to focus upon their personal shortcomings. Whatever the key message is, it must also recognise the responsibilities of policy makers and service providers. Subsequently, the theme should target everyone, and also highlight organisational, political, structural, environmental, cultural ... issues when possible.

- As discussed in last year's Planning Group, the language that we use when describing MHW is important - as it can affirm or blame or praise or exclude ... both men, themselves, and those who can have an impact upon their lives. We need to avoid the 'blame game' on all fronts.
- Where possible, we should use positive terms / phrases such as: *'listening to men', 'hearing men's voices', 'responding to need', 'creating opportunities', 'offering support', 'providing encouragement', 'seeking change', 'promoting positive action', 'respecting men's lives', 'self / organisational reflection and introspection', 'planning for the future', 'learning from men's experience', 'overcoming barriers', 'expanding options', 'promoting equality', 'offering choices', 'making the connections', 'working together', 'having new conversations', 'diverse needs', 'working shoulder-to-shoulder', 'challenging the myths', 'partnership and cooperation' ...*
- MHW 2015 (and every year) is both a celebration of men's health / wellbeing / lives and a call to action / for change. This call is to all the stakeholders in men's health e.g. policy makers, funding bodies, service providers, men's groups, community projects, families, churches, media outlets, men themselves ...
- It was acknowledged that it is often easier to get media and public attention for a specific illness or negative issue (e.g. aggressive cancers or suicide or domestic violence) rather than a 'good news' story. However, if MHW 2015 is to promote men in a new light, it needs to stick with a positive theme. This will, however, mean that we will miss the high profile shock - horror media coverage that would be generated by a 'Men in Crisis' or 'Men Behaving Badly' headline.
- Ideally, we should have a MHW theme which can be easily recognisable in a graphic / poster - as an image can grab attention far more easily than using lots of words.
- Following much discussion, it was agreed that the overall theme should be: **'Creating Climate Change - it's time for a new script'**.
- This theme will emphasise the need for a fundamental change in climate / environment / culture if men's health and wellbeing needs are to be met. It will also call for a new 'script' (e.g. plan, strategy, plot, storyline, guidance, set of expectations, life map ...) for men and boys which is based upon listening to, learning from, and responding to their needs and experience in a gender-sensitive way. Everyone (including men and boys) will be invited to let go of the old script and to embrace a new one.
- Ideally, we should try to find a clever way to get people's attention and to encourage them to see things differently. By way of example, Darach quoted the strapline of an anti-racism Ad starring Jason Sherlock which said: *'Jason Sherlock is a member of a small ethnic minority - Dubs with all-Ireland medals'*.

## 5. Current Plans for Men's Health Week

Lorcan invited everyone to share any plans that their own organisation might have to mark Men's Health Week 2015. These included ...

FINIAN - Will be using his HSE contacts and links to the HSE Communications Department to raise awareness of MHW, will play a role in liaising with the media in relation to the week, and will support MHW activities in the Dublin North East area.

KEN - MALES Ireland hope to run a Men's Rites of Passage event.

PAUL - The Belfast Men's Health Group will be organising a large-scale health and wellbeing event for men in Belfast City Hall.

MICHAEL - Will be involved in men's health checks in community and workplace settings, and is developing an initiative to hear men's experiences in places where they meet e.g. bars, bookies, barbers etc.

DARACH - Hopes to support local men's group events across Dublin.

PETER - As it's early days yet, he hasn't any firm plans - but would hope to organise something.

EVA - Hopes to have a Louth-wide celebration event / workshop in one of the Men's Sheds.

HELEN - Would like to 'up-the-ante' on their previous work with men. May also include some relaxation sessions this year.

JOHN - Will be organising another walk for men and boys to the top of the Hill of Uisneach in the centre of Ireland. He also hopes to repeat his 'Man Time' festival for men in the inner-city, and to get 'Newstalk' involved as early as possible.

DAVID - Will be working to bring men's groups together, focus on 2-3 policy issues, and seek media coverage for this work.

FRANCES - Will be running men's health checks and programmes across the SHSCT area.

LORCAN - Will be organising a number of events throughout Co. Wexford, and will raise awareness of the week with the voluntary and community sectors throughout Ireland.

COLIN - Will coordinate the design / printing of posters and logos; collate and promote details of activities; draft a briefing paper on MHW; prepare a document on 'what can I do to mark this week'; promote MHW online.

## **6. Date of Next Meeting**

The next MHW 2015 Planning Group meeting will take place on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> January 2015, at 11.00am. As those present enjoyed the experience of working together, it was agreed to hold one more face-to-face meeting, and this gathering will be held, once again, in the Diocesan Pastoral Centre, The Magnet, The Demesne, Dundalk, Co. Louth. It will finish with lunch served at 1.00pm.